

Northern Virginia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (NVLTCOP)



Office of the State
Long-Term Care
Ombudsman

Promoting Quality - Protecting Rights

*Serving the Jurisdictions of Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun,
through their Area Agencies on Aging*



THE UPDATE

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2015 WHITE HOUSE

CONFERENCE

on AGING

2015 White House Conference on Aging

The Elder Justice Coalition summarized several actions taken by the Obama administration at this month's 2015 White House Conference on Aging. There is a Department of Justice final rule to be issued this year on the Victims of Crime Act revising the current guidelines to specify that assistance funds can be used for crime victims to pay for legal services. In addition, the need to support social and legal services for elder victims of abuse, financial exploitation, fraud and neglect was emphasized. To allow for this coverage, congress made a significant increase in spending for the Victims of Crime Act from \$700 million to \$2.3 billion.

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Other announcements from the 2015 White House Conference on Aging include:

- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will issue a proposed rule improving the quality of life in nursing homes. The rule proposes enhancement of improving resident safety and regulatory requirements so that they are in closer alignment with current professional standards.
- The Administration for Community Living is launching a \$4 million Brain Health Awareness campaign.
- There will be an Elder Justice Initiative through the Department of Justice with a pilot project evaluating new approaches to help in avoiding and responding to elder mistreatment.
- The National Prevention Council will release a Healthy Aging Action Plan in Spring 2016.
- The National Institutes of Health will promote physical activity events for older adults beginning in September 2015 with their Go4Life Month.
- The Department of Justice will train elder abuse prosecutors in all 50 states to effectively prosecute elder abuse and financial exploitation and develop online training for law enforcement officers.
- To improve the prevention of elder abuse, the National Institute of Health will convene a state of the science workshop on elder abuse in the fall covering understanding and preventing abuse, and examining screening tools to identify abuse victims.
- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau will release an advisory by the end of 2015 to help financial institutions prevent, recognize and report elder financial exploitation.

More information can be found at:

www.hhs.gov/news/press/2015pres/07/20150713c.html.



Latest Facts and Figures on Alzheimer's

The Alzheimer's Association new report, *2015 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures*, found that less than half of people with Alzheimer's disease were informed of their diagnosis by their doctor; however, 90 percent of people with common cancers, such as breast, colorectal, lung, and prostate cancer, are informed about their diagnosis by their doctors.

In this report, Beth Kallmyer, MSW, states that the low rates for advising people about Alzheimer's Disease is similar to the low rates of telling patients they had cancer in the 1950's and 60's. Not informing a person that they have Alzheimer's disease takes away that person's right to take part in making decisions regarding care and treatment, including providing informed consent for treatment, or making decisions on legal and financial issues.

One consequence of withholding a diagnosis is that the person may not seek treatment early on that could possibly delay the onset of advanced symptoms.

The report found that an estimated 5.3 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease. Of these, an estimated 5.1 million are over 65. In 2015, almost half a million over the age of 65 in the United States will develop Alzheimer's. The increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's continues due to the lack of effective treatment. According to the report, Alzheimer's and other dementias cost \$226 billion in 2015, making it the costliest disease. Of this total, \$153 billion is in payments from Medicare and Medicaid.

The full report on *2015 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* can be found on the Alzheimer's Association website, www.alz.org.

WHAT HELPS AND WHAT HURTS BRAIN HEALTH

According to Elizabeth Agnvall in the AARP Bulletin, June 2015, "There's some good news on cognitive function as you age." If you want your brain to stay sharp, be sure to get regular exercise, eat heart-healthy foods, and take medications as prescribed. This is the advice in a report on brain health by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine and cosponsored by AARP.

There are steps we can take that may be effective in maintaining our brain health.



What is helpful:

- Include aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes or more at a time is more advantageous than smaller sessions. It's been shown that people over 65 who start exercising have more of a benefit than people 55 to 65.
- Stay socially and intellectually active. Engage in activities that stimulate your brain, such as reading or learning a new language. Begin or maintain social activities such as playing cards, talking to friends, attending religious services, and volunteering.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that includes more vegetables, nuts, beans and whole grains, and less meat. The Department of Health and Human Services will be releasing new dietary guidelines in 2015 for overall health. No one diet has been proven effective for maintaining brain health.

- What is good for your heart (keeping high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes under control) is also helpful for your brain health and can possibly prevent brain problems.
- Get a good night sleep. If you think you might have sleep apnea, see a doctor. Treating this may help delay memory problems.



What can hurt brain health:

- Late life depression—there is a concern that it can possibly be an early symptom of an undiagnosed brain health issue.
- Hearing and vision problems have been linked to thinking and memory loss, as well as lessened socialization. It is important to have these changes corrected as soon as possible. According to a Johns Hopkins study, these losses can lead to a greater rate of brain shrinkage.
- Some medications, including antihistamines, anti-depressants, and sleep aids may increase the risk of dementia. It is important to know the possible side effects of medications you may take in these categories.
- Stress that is long-term is correlated with faster rates of decline in brain function. Taking steps to relieve stress, such as meditation and mindfulness, may help but have not been proven effective.

Things to watch out for:

Be careful of brain training that promises to improve memory, but it may only do so when you're playing the game. Also, vitamins and other dietary supplements, such as vitamin D and ginkgo biloba, have not been proven to be effective for improving memory or preventing decline.

There is additional information on the AARP website under "[Brain Health.](#)"

SOCIAL SECURITY TURNS 80

By David J. Melton

Social Security Public Affairs Specialist

Eighty years ago, on August 14, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law. The new law guaranteed a basic income for retirees and, at the time, the unemployed. Over the years, Social Security has expanded its safety net to provide benefits for retirees, people with disabilities and the chronically ill, and spouses and children of deceased workers. The agency has evolved to serve the needs of a changing America. Now, we're celebrating this historic anniversary by looking at both our successful past, and the path to an even brighter future.

Social Security is there for you during all stages of life. Right from the beginning, we issue a unique Social Security number to most newborns when an application is taken at the hospital. This allows us to track your income over your working career and accurately calculate your retirement benefit. We provide disability benefits to injured and chronically ill workers and their families. We provide survivors benefits to widows, widowers, and the minors of deceased workers. We also provide Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to those with low income and resources, and Extra Help with Medicare prescription drug costs for people who qualify.

In our decades of experience, Social Security has evolved to meet the fast-paced demands of the digital world. Creating an online My Social Security account, for instance, let's you view your Social Security Statement, verify the accuracy of your earnings record, and get estimates of future monthly benefits. Once you begin receiving Social Security benefits, you can use your online account to manage your record, including changing your address and phone number, checking your benefit information, changing your electronic payment method, and obtaining an instant benefit verification letter or replacement SSA-1099/1042S. If you haven't already, you can easily sign up for a My Social Security account at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount.

Our safe and secure online services allow you to apply for retirement, spouse's, Medicare, and disability benefits from the comfort of your home. You can quickly complete an online retirement application at www.socialsecurity.gov/applyonline.

Looking to the future, we recently released our Vision 2025, a strategic plan to help us shape the future of Social Security service delivery and maintain clear communication with you. For more information about our vision for the next ten years, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/vision2025.

We look to the next 80 years with a renewed commitment to proudly serving Social Security customers throughout their lifetime, when and where they need us. See how Social Security has evolved over the years at www.socialsecurity.gov/history.

David J. Melton

Public Affairs Specialist

OMBUDSMAN VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT - Gail Ressler



I was born and raised in Livingston, New Jersey with a younger brother who now lives in New Hampshire. I started my career as a registered nurse in New Jersey with a specialty in burn nursing. After a great weekend trip to Washington D.C. with a couple of girlfriends we decided it would be a fun place to live. I packed up and moved to Northern Virginia in 1978 where I continued nursing at the MedStar Washington Hospital Center managing the renal transplant unit. After seven years there, I pursued a business opportunity in medical sales and eventually became Vice President of

Sales for the Hill-Rom company which specializes in products for wound care and respiratory problems.

I have been married to my wonderful husband Al for 29 years. Although we have no children, we have numerous nieces and nephews that we are close to and stay busy visiting family in New Hampshire, Montana and North Dakota. On the home front we have two adopted kitties, Harley and Ziva.

After 25 years with Hill-Rom and extensive travel, I decided it was time to retire and begin another life chapter. I started playing lots of golf, enjoyed my long walks around Burke Lake and got the exercise bug with Jazzercise. I began volunteering in a Hospice program and did that for a couple of years until the program closed. Looking for other volunteer opportunities, I saw the request for the Ombudsman program in the newspaper and signed up right away. I've been involved since 2011. I have been immersed in healthcare for so many years it was a natural fit for me to be a resident advocate. The nursing home I cover has several levels of care which include skilled nursing, a ventilator unit, as well as long-term care, each providing different challenges and issues for the residents.

My most rewarding experiences are those where the residents take part in resolving the problem they have brought to my attention. Helping them participate in the problem solving process gives them a sense of control and often times minimizes their level of frustration. A once timid resident who speaks out about a problem is a joy to see!

I am fortunate to have an Administrator who is responsive and recognizes the role of the Ombudsman. We have established quarterly meetings to review trends that have been problematic. She in turn brings those issues to her staff meetings for discussion, feedback and follow-up. Two other colleagues who also cover the facility attend these sessions as well. Having a good relationship with facility managers who can impact change and solve problems makes my experience more gratifying.

My greatest challenge is to get consistency in problem resolution...to come back and find the same problem re-occurring after weeks of success is frustrating but it is important for the resident to know I am there for them and will continue to work their issues. The relationships that are formed with the residents are so very special and the loss of someone I see on a weekly basis is painful; that's probably the hardest part of the volunteer experience. I find comfort in knowing my time spent has somehow helped bring dignity, respect, quality care and quality of life for those who find themselves in a long-term care facility.

What an Ombudsman does:

- ♦ **Advocates** for improving the quality of life for persons receiving long-term care services
- ♦ **Resolves complaints** against long-term care providers through **counseling, negotiation, and investigation**
- ♦ **Provides information** about long-term care providers to help make an informed decision
- ♦ **Educates** the community about long-term care issues
- ♦ **Visits** residents of long-term care facilities on a weekly basis through our volunteer program
- ♦ **Trains** long-term care staff on long-term care related information



The Northern Virginia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in all programs and services. To request reasonable accommodations or alternate formats, call 703-324-5861 (voice); 711 (TTY).

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Need Information or Have a Concern About Nursing or Assisted Living Facilities?

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Offices hours are Monday through
Friday

from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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Fax: 703-324-3575

Email us at:

NVLTCOP@FairfaxCounty.Gov

**To view information on the
NVLTCOP
website and to see the
Investigation and Complaint Log,
please go to:**

www.FairfaxCounty.Gov/LTCOmbudsman